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ABSTRACT

Good health is important to a child's ability to learn in school and succeed in life. This guide is intended for the use of health and education professionals who are working with a national campaign designed to teach parents and parents-to-be the critical connection between good health and their children's ability to learn. The campaign deals with prenatal care, nutrition, immunizations, and screening and diagnostic exams. The booklet includes: (1) an explanation of the importance of the campaign and the crucial role of health and education professionals in conveying to parents the interrelationships between good health and learning potential; (2) descriptions of campaign materials and activities, such as videos, message pads and magnets, a health and education primer, video and audio news releases, and Spanish radio public service announcements; (3) a list of ways to promote the health and education message by incorporating the message in daily work with parents, and by educating organizations and the community; (4) a list of national organizations that provide assistance in working with children and families; and (5) tips for parents concerning babies' health, proper nutrition, immunization, and vision, dental, and hearing check-ups. (SM)

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A Community Action Guide to Promote the Health/Education Connection Among Parents and Parents-to-be

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NATIONAL HEALTH/EDUCATION CONSORTIUM

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A Parent Information Project of the
National Health/Education Consortium

Sponsored by:
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The National Health/Education Consortium is a joint initiative of the Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Commission to Prevent Infant Mortality. Comprised of 55 national organizations representing nearly 11 million health and education professionals, the Consortium works to bridge the gap between the worlds of health and education, promoting improvements in programs and policies for children.

HELP ME LEARN, HELP ME GROW

"Every child, every day, ready to learn in every way!"

Educators know that health influences learning. Children who are hungry, have trouble seeing or hearing, lack energy, are distracted, or use drugs need special attention and often do not learn as well as healthy children.

By the same token, health care practitioners know that education can promote children's health. If women learn not to smoke, drink, or use drugs while they are pregnant, if parents know how important it is to get their child immunized, and if children themselves realize the value of good nutrition and healthy lifestyles, it is likely that our nation's children will be healthier and better able to reach their full educational potential.

As a health or education professional, you understand this key connection. The message, however, does not always reach those who need to hear it the most: PARENTS! It's important that health and education professionals not only **understand** the health/education connection but **emphasize** that connection as often as possible to parents and families in ways that are sensitive and helpful.

This **Community Action Guide** is designed to help you spread the word about the connection between children's good health and their learning potential to the parents and families in your community. With the help of this guide and the accompanying campaign materials, you can lead your community to take action to make sure all children are healthy and ready to learn when they reach the schoolhouse door.

BACKGROUND

Good health is important to a child's ability to learn in school and succeed in life. A child must be healthy in order to learn; a child must learn in order to be healthy.

Many health problems can affect learning. Lack of prenatal care and poor maternal health can directly affect a child's brain development and birth outcome. A healthy pregnancy provides the best chance for a child's healthy development, both physically and mentally, and, ultimately, the best chance for a child to excel in school.

As a child grows, his/her health and wellbeing continue to impact learning potential. Hunger, poor vision or hearing, increased blood lead levels, dental caries, and accidents all interfere with a child's ability to concentrate and do well in school.

Parents are poised to influence their children's health and wellbeing from the earliest moment. They are the most important role model and the primary source of information for their children. Because parents are so instrumental in helping their children become healthy and ready to learn, parents need to understand fully and appreciate the close relationship between the quality of their children's health and their learning potential.

THE CAMPAIGN

"Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow" is a multimedia effort, produced in both English and Spanish, to educate parents and parents-to-be about the health/education connection and what they can do to promote their child's optimal learning potential. The campaign is designed to give parents the information and tools they need to understand the issues and take action for their children's health, both physical and mental.

Health and education professionals have a crucial role to play in conveying to parents and parents-to-be the interrelationship between good health and learning potential. These campaign materials are a tool for you to use to help reinforce the message.

The campaign materials distributed with this Community Action Guide include:

- **Video "Infomercials"** — Presented through the eyes of the parents, this video looks at the importance of prenatal care, nutrition,

immunizations and periodic health screening and diagnostic exams as each impacts a child's health and ability to learn. The video can be used in a variety of settings. Total running time for the English version is approximately six minutes. Total running time for the Spanish version is approximately eight minutes.

- **Message Pads and Magnets** — Message pads and magnets displaying the colorful "Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow" theme will provide parents and parents-to-be with a lasting reminder of the health/education connection message.

- **Health/Education Primer** — The primer is a written guide for parents and parents-to-be designed as a pamphlet that unfolds into a full-size poster. The primer outlines the fundamental connection between health and education and provides parents with a more detailed "keepsake" on what it means to have their children healthy and ready to learn. The primer also includes activities and resources to promote a child's optimum growth and learning.

The campaign also includes:

- English and Spanish Video News Releases;

- English and Spanish Audio News Releases; and

- Spanish Radio Public Service Announcements.

These materials are being disseminated by the National Health/Education Consortium through media channels and will serve to augment your efforts at the grassroots level.

The primary target for this campaign is "hard to reach" parents — those families who are least likely to have access to the information and services needed to promote the good health and wellbeing necessary for their children to do well in school and succeed in life. However, all parents can benefit from the information presented through "Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow."

HOW TO USE THE CAMPAIGN

The "Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow" materials can be used in any situation to help parents or parents-to-be learn more about how they can have a positive impact on their children's health and ability to learn.

The materials can enhance related information you may be charged with disseminating. For example, you may already talk to parents about different aspects of their children's health, i.e., lead screening, immunizations, dental checks, etc. You may work with parents to promote education, literacy and work skills. For either of these scenarios, you can apply the crucial health/education message — "a child who is healthy is a child who has a better chance to learn and succeed."

Some of the materials are designed to be given directly to parents, but your guidance is crucial to ensuring that the overall message is effectively communicated and understood by parents and, ultimately, their children.

The following ideas will get you started in using the campaign. Your creativity and the support of your organization will greatly enhance your ability to convey the message and the materials to parents.

The Video

- Arrange for ongoing presentation in clinic waiting rooms, at health fairs, and in locations where parents most in need can be contacted, i.e., Medicaid or WIC offices.

- Display in clinic examination rooms for patients while they are waiting, or show it in response to specific questions they may have during the examinations.

- Incorporate into prenatal classes or other classes such as nutrition, parenting, safety, etc.

- Use as a one-on-one teaching guide during family home visits .

- Use in schools at parents' meetings to introduce a discussion with parents on the health/education connection.

- Use at parent/child centers or in schools where parent participation is part of the structure, such as "parent resource" rooms.

- Make copies of the video available through the school library or "parent resource" room for parents to view or borrow. Better yet, hold an after-school or evening parent/child discussion on the health/education connection in your school library and show the video.

- Show the video to parents registering their children for preschool.

- Show the video on your school's television system.

The Message Pads and Magnets

- Provide a message pad/magnet set to clients after you have explained the significance of the health/education link.

- Write the date and time of your patient's next appointment or other pertinent information on the pad to take home.

- Display the message pads and magnets next to the television while airing the video for clients to pick up after watching the video. Make sure they **accompany** the video or primer which provide more explanation of the message.

- Distribute the message pads and magnets at health fairs and other forums where parents and families may be in attendance.

- Pass out the pads and magnets to parents at one-on-one parent-teacher meetings.

- Distribute the pads and magnets at parent/teacher organization meetings.

- Give the pads and magnets to students to take home to parents.

- Target special occasions to highlight the health/education message. For example, Valentine's Day is a perfect occasion to distribute the "Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow" heart-apple pads and magnets!

The Primer

- Display the primers in clinic waiting rooms, inside examining rooms, grocery stores, community centers, places of worship and in locations where parents most in need can be contacted, i.e., Medicaid or WIC offices.

- Distribute copies of the primer to clients following your explanation of the health and education connection. Encourage them to **read** the primer and keep it to remind them of ways to keep their children healthy and ready to learn.

- Distribute and explain the primers during home visits to families, and make sure school social workers take the primers to parents on home visits.

- Lead community health discussion groups using the primer as the centerpiece of discussion.

- Hold special meetings with parents to discuss the health/education message and distribute the primer. Have a "meet your child for breakfast or lunch" day and give a brief presentation on the health/education connection. Show the video, then pass out the primer and pads and magnets for parents to take home.

- Make copies of the primer available in the school library, office or "parent resource" room.

BEYOND PARENTS: PROMOTING THE HEALTH/EDUCATION MESSAGE

As an individual, your understanding of and willingness to incorporate the health/education connection message in your day-to-day work with parents is key to helping children grow up healthy and ready to learn. However, your ability to influence your co-workers, your supervisor, your community leaders, and perhaps leaders in organizations to which you belong is crucial to "networking" the health/education connection among professionals who work with and make a difference in the lives of children and families.

The "Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow" materials provide an opportunity for you to work with others to spread the health/education message beyond just parents. For the message to really hit home, it must be integrated in a variety of health, education and community settings.

Educate Your Organization

Start within your own organization. It's important to know that everyone is working with the same information. To be sure your organization understands the connection:

- Convene a meeting of all employees or member representatives, etc., to discuss the health/education connection message and the importance of incorporating it into day-to-day interaction with children and families.

- Discuss ways in which the health/education connection directly affects the population you serve and ways to promote the message.

- If you work in a health related field, contact an education professional (and vice versa) to discuss ways to "team up" for optimum reach to families and children.

- Contact the National Health/Education Consortium for background support materials and networking strategies/opportunities/referrals.

Educate Your Community

To ensure general support and understanding of why children need to be healthy to learn (and vice versa), the entire community must be aware of the health/education message. The video news releases, public service announcements and other media events will jump start the community. Church groups, civic organizations, and business leaders all can take part in promoting healthy children.

Using the support materials from the National Health/Education Consortium, begin community awareness activities such as:

- **Health Fairs** — Help sponsor activities that incorporate the health/education message. For example, hold the health fair at a school. Health fairs are an excellent opportunity for parents, students, teachers and the health community to work together.

    - **Nutrition Booths** — Distribute food and recipes for children and parents to make together. Have an area where children design placemats that incorporate the campaign message that they can take home. One idea: relate food/nutrition to car fuel — "energy to learn."

    - **Immunization Booths** — Provide an opportunity for parents to learn about childhood diseases, how each disease can significantly impede a child's learning ability, and how each can be prevented with appropriate immunizations. Provide immunization schedules and/or on-site immunizations or information on how to obtain immunizations.

    - **Exercise Booths** — Show how physical fitness greatly enhances one's wellbeing and ability to learn. Include examples of activities that parents and children can do together.

    - **Safety Booths** — Have a local police officer join a health team member to demonstrate a number of safety

tips for the home and the school. This can include injury prevention tips as well as poison prevention. Show how injuries can keep a child from exploring and learning as well as keep a child out of school.

- **Lead Information Booths** — Teach the hazards of lead in the environment and how lead affects brain development. Give suggestions on how to reduce lead hazards and lead exposure. Provide information about available lead testing in your community.

- **Health/Education Booths** — Design a "head of the class" game where players move ahead with cards that have "good breakfast — you had a lot of energy which helped you ace that spelling test," "regular sleep — helped you concentrate and be alert in class," and others that address routine exercise, health and dental checkups. Players are held back with measles, poor vision, toothaches, fatigue and other cards. Play the game at the booth and pass out coupons for healthy foods, free toothbrushes or play eye glasses as prizes for the winners.

- **Healthy Body Booths** — Demonstrate how each of the body's senses plays a role in the ability to learn. Provide opportunities for children to experience the feeling of blindness, deafness or immobility with props such as blindfolds, or prescription glasses, earplugs and slings. Demonstrate how difficult, but not imposible, it is to succeed with such impediments.

- **Recreation Department Activities** — Encourage your local recreation department to adopt the "Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow" message in each of its health promotion and education classes.

- **Religious/Civic Activities** — Have each organization adopt the "Help Me Learn, Help Me Grow" theme. Healthy children are a part of any family life campaign, any training campaign for business, and any leadership campaign for civic groups.

Encourage your church leaders to discuss the health/education connection during worship or in newsletters.

- **Business Activities** — There is tremendous potential among the private sector to "communicate" the health/education connection. In addition to providing monetary support to health and education initiatives in your community, business has a direct relationship with parents as employees and can relay messages through the workplace. Get your local business involved in the "Help me Learn, Help Me Grow" campaign.

- **Town Meetings** — Encourage your local government officials to hold a town meeting or work through leaders in your profession to educate the community about what's being done to better connect health and education services for children.

- **Health/Education Collaboration** — Suggest ways the health and education communities can work together. Have the health department and education department arrange school class trips to the clinic. Have nurses from the health department give classes on health related topics in the school.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The members of the National Health/Education Consortium may have additional information that will help you in your work with children and families. Many of the following organizations have state and/or local affiliates.

American Academy of Family Physicians	202/232-9033
American Academy of Pediatrics	202/662-7460
American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education	202/293-2450
American Association of School Administrators	703/875-0719
American College of Nurse-Midwives	202/289-4351
American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists	202/638-5577
American Dental Association	312/440-2500
American Federation of Teachers	202/879-4463
American Hospital Association	202/638-1100
American Indian Health Care Association	612/293-0233
American Medical Association	312/464-4532
American School Health Association	216/678-1601
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association	301/897-5700

Association for the Care of Children's Health	301/654-6549
Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development	703/549-9110
Association of American Medical Colleges	202/828-0400
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs	202/775-0436
Association of Schools of Public Health	202/842-4668
Association of State & Territorial Dental Directors	314/751-6247
Association of State & Territorial Health Officials	202/546-5400
Council of Chief State School Officers	202/408-5505
Council of Great City Schools	202/371-0163
Elementary School Center	212/289-5929
Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies	202/863-2458
NAACOG-Organization for OB/GYN and Neonatal Nurses	202/638-5577
National Alliance of Black School Educators	202/483-1549
National Assoc. for Asian & Pacific American Education	405/325-1731
National Association for the Education of Young Children	202/232-8777
National Association for Partners in Education	703/836-4880
National Assoc. of Children's Hospitals & Related Institutions	703/684-1355
National Association of Community Health Centers	202/659-8008
National Association of Elementary School Principals	703/684-3345
National Association of Hispanic Nurses	202/387-2477
National Assoc. of Pediatric Nurse Assoc. & Practitioners	202/544-1880
National Association of School Nurses	207/883-2117
National Association of Secondary School Principals	703/860-0200
National Association of Social Workers, Inc.	202/408-8600
National Association of State Boards of Education	703/684-4000
National Association of WIC Directors	202/232-5492
National Black Nurses Association	202/393-6870
National Coalition of Hispanic Health & Human Service Orgs.	202/387-5000
National Community Education Association	703/683-6232
National Congress of Parents and Teachers	202/331-1380
National Education Association	202/822-7570
National Head Start Association	703/739-0875
National Indian Education Association	202/835-3001
National Medical Association	202/347-1895
National Mental Health Association	703/684-7722
National Perinatal Association	813/971-1008
National Rural Health Association	301/974-4775
National School Boards Association	703/838-6736
National School Public Relations Association	703/528-5840
Society of Neuroscience	202/462-6688
Zero to Three/National Center for Clinical Infant Programs	703/528-4300

HELP ME LEARN, HELP ME GROW
TIPS FOR PARENTS

The following tips are included in the video and in the primer for parents and parents-to-be. We have duplicated them here as an "easy access" reference for health and education professionals to use or to photocopy for parents.

Tips on Having a Healthy Baby

Your baby's healthy development before birth and during the early years is very important to his/her success in school. Even if this isn't your first baby, each is special! You can help prepare your child for learning by making sure you get good prenatal and well-baby care.

- As soon as you find out you're pregnant, see a doctor or health care professional, and don't miss your appointments! Your health and your baby's health depend on it.

- Make a commitment to getting regular prenatal care. Think you can't afford it? Don't know how to find it? Help is available, often through your local health department or community health center.

- Take good care of yourself. Don't smoke, drink alcohol, or take other drugs. Take medicine only if given to you by your doctor. Remember, whatever you take, your baby is taking too.

- Eat plenty of healthy foods to give you and your growing baby the extra energy needed to stay strong. "Junk foods" will slow you down and won't help your baby grow.

- Get the whole family involved! Having a baby can be a great experience for everyone. If you have other children, talk about the new baby with them too.

- Choose your baby's health care provider before he/she is born. Regular check-ups are very important to your baby's growth and learning. Don't be afraid to ask questions about your baby's health!

- There are many new responsibilities that come with having a baby. Don't get frustrated! Talk to someone you trust — your parents, family members, friends or health care provider. The more you know, the easier it will be for you and your family.

Tips on Eating Right

Children aren't always easy to feed, much less feed right! However, it's important that you at least **try** everyday to get them to eat foods which will help them grow and be the best they can be now and when they go to school. Here are some ideas that might help:

- Let your children help you with food shopping and cooking meals.
- Learn more about nutrition from someone you trust and who knows the facts — your doctor or health care provider, a family member, or a local clinic nutritionist. Good nutrition is very important to your child's growth and learning.
- Good nutrition doesn't have to cost a lot. An apple costs less than a bag of chips! Be patient — change doesn't happen overnight.
- Eating right can be fun! Kids love to paint, so how about letting them "paint" graham crackers with peanut butter or jam and decorate with raisins or sliced fruit! Try "birds' nests" — mashed potatoes with peas on top — or make a clown face out of vegetables!
- Cut down on high fat foods and sugary drinks. Try these simple changes:
  - Bake or broil foods, don't fry.
  - Buy low fat or skim milk instead of whole milk.
  - Get juice or juice-based drinks instead of soda.
  - Freeze juice to make healthy popscicles for snacks.
- Introduce "healthy" foods one at a time. That way if your child doesn't like it, you won't spend a lot of money on foods he/she won't eat.
- Children will do what you do. So, if you want them to eat right, you need to eat right!

Tips on Getting Immunized

Immunizations are the best health insurance you can give to your child. Your child should be immunized (through a series of shots) against eight childhood diseases — DTP, which is diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (whooping cough); polio; Haemophilus influenzae type b (Hib vaccine); and M-M-R II which is measles, mumps and rubella (German measles) — plus hepatitis B. To help you understand immunizations remember:

- Immunizations are important! Your child has a much greater chance of becoming sick or even dying from a childhood disease by not getting the shots.

- Don't be afraid to ask questions. Your health care provider can tell you about immunizations. All children should be immunized by age 2, but immunizations begin shortly after birth and continue through age 2 — get the facts!

- Don't put off immunizing your child because of cost. In many areas, immunizations are free for families with limited income. Check with your local health department or with your health care provider for more information.

- Shots can hurt, but only for a minute. If your child is afraid, take time to talk to your child. Tell him or her that all children have to take the shots to be healthy and ready to learn.

- Talk to your child about visits to the doctor and why they have to go. It's not always because they are sick — doctors and nurses help keep them from getting sick!

- Praise your child when its over!

- After the shots, treat your child to his/her favorite activity — something good to eat or a trip to the park.

Tips on Vision, Hearing and Dental Check-ups

Your child's success in school depends on good health. If your child can't see the blackboard, can't hear the teacher, or has a toothache, chances are he/she won't be learning much. Stop problems before they start by following these tips:

- Get regular vision, hearing and dental check-ups. Have your health care provider set up a regular schedule for your child.
- Take advantage of free screening services. Ask about these at your local clinic or health department.
- Talk to your children about good health habits like brushing their teeth everyday after meals.
- Go to the library and read books with your children about visiting the dentist, wearing glasses, and hearing.
- Tell your children to let you know if they're having trouble seeing or hearing, or if they have pain in their teeth or gums. Listen to your child! He/she may be telling you something important.

HELP US LEARN, HELP US GROW!

We'd like to hear your suggestions on how we can strengthen and improve this campaign in the future. Please help us to help you by answering these few questions. Please add additional pages if you need more space. Thanks!

Did you use the materials?_____

If so, which ones and how?_____

_____

How often?_____

Who is your target audience?_____

_____

Did you feel your audience easily understood the message?_____

_____

Did you discuss the message together?_____

Did your clients ask questions or seek follow-up?_____

_____

How would you improve this campaign?_____

_____

Are there other materials you would find helpful?_____

_____

Please mail or fax your response to:

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